DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 077 921 SP 006 626

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TITLE How Students See Teachers.
PUB DATE [72]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Effective Teaching; Student Attitudes; *Student Opinion; *Student Reaction; *Teacher Behavior; Teacher Characteristics; *Teacher Evaluation; Teacher Role; Teaching Quality

ABSTRACT

A study of student-perceived teacher roles was attempted at four different school levels: elementary school, middle school, high school, and college. In each case, students were asked to give three qualities which characterized the "good" teacher and three qualities which characterized the "bad" teacher. Written responses were then postcoded and scored in one of 18 possible categories according to a protocol adapted from studies at Western Michigan University. Results were compared for students in the different schcols and for differences between the sexes. Qualities that became increasingly important in the higher school levels were also indicated. (Author/JA)

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385

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HOW STUDENTS SEE TEACHERS

by James Kenny, Gertrude Hentschel, and Kathy Elpers

What is the role of the teacher? Who is the "good teacher"? Who is the "bad teacher"? There are basically four ways to answer these questions. One could attempt to find out what administrators expect of teachers, how the teachers view themselves, how their students see them, or what the general public thinks of teachers. All four of these role descriptions would probably differ. This article is about one of these four role descriptions: how students see their teachers.

Thus the data here is not the only and final word on what the teacher's role is or should be. However, it is useful for teachers to know what their students expect of them. It is also useful to those who teach different ages, or in other cultures, to get a "feel" for the correspondingly differing expectations. Students of different ages and students in different cultures may expect varying behaviors of their teachers.

Methodology

The approach used here was quite simple. Four groups of students, each about four years apart, were asked to give three qualities for both good and bad teachers. More specifically, students in third grade, seventh grade, sophomore English classes in high school, and introductory psychology classes in college were selected. All of the students were attending school in a small town in Indiana (5,000 population) in October, 1971, when the study was done. In each case, the population consisted of the entire group (e.g. all the third graders, all the seventh graders, etc.)

Third grade was chosen as representative of the Elementary School. Being midway between first and fifth grade, it was felt they were in school long enough to develop some consistent teacher role expectations. There were 70 third graders who participated. Seventh grade was selected as representing the Middle School, which in this town comprised grades six through eight. There were 150 seventh graders.

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SP 006 636

At the high school and college level, the attempt was made to get a predominantly sophomore group. After some discussion, the groups selected as representative of the respective areas were high school classes in English and college classes in introductory Psychology. The college in the study was an accredited Catholic college with about 1100 students. 106 high school students and 86 college studenrs took part in the study.

The protocol consisted of two questions, and was simply worded so that the same protocol might be used for all four age groups. The questions were:

1) "Think of some good teachers. Try to give three reasons why you think they were good teachers."
2) "Think of some bad teachers. Try to give three reasons why you think they were bad teachers."

These questions were passed out to all the students with three blank lines under each question for the answers. The same instruction was also read aloud. Since each student was to give three reasons, 70 third graders provided approximately three times as many good (or bad) teacher qualities. Obviously, some students could not think of three while others provided one or two extra. Most of the students, however, followed instructions and gave three qualities. In any case, all the qualities given by the students were counted and weighted equally.

The qualities of good and bad teachers given by the students were all post-coded by research assistant Kathy Elpers. Where she had trouble determining the most appropriate category, she consulted with the senior author. The scoring categories are listed in the Appendix. The first fourteen categories are from a continuing teacher evaluation project at Western Michigan University (Bryan, 1969). Categories 15-18 were added by Ms. Elpers.

Results

Table one lists the number of subjects in each school group, and the number of good and bad teacher qualities that they provided. The qualities should be approximately three times greater than the number of student subjects.

Table One: Research Population and Total Responses

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School	College	Total
Number of student subjects	70	150	106	86	412
Number of good qualities given	202	435	301	249	1187
Number of bad qualities given	166	400	293	244	1103

The "Good" Teacher

Table two lists the good teacher qualities by percents. Percentages are used to provide a standard score for purposes of easier comparison. The actual number of qualities given by the students can, of course, be obtained by multiplying the number of qualities given in each area by the percent. Each table is followed with some typical actual student responses. The qualities are listed in the general order of their frequency. The reader should consult the Appendix for a more detailed description of the categories themselves.

Table three lists the good teacher qualities by rank. It is derived from Table two.

Table Two: Good Teacher Qualities (In Percents)

Overall Ave. Rank		Elementary School	Middle School	High School	College
1.	Attitude Toward Students:	23.8	30.6	17.3	18.9
2.	Ability to Stimulate Interest:	6.4	7.4	9.6	14.5
3.	Variety in Teaching Procedures:	22.3	10.3	9.6	4.8
4.	Clarity of Explanations:	2.5	10.3	9.0	4.8
4.	Attitude Toward Subject:	1.5	7.6	7.6	10.4
6.	Sense of Humor:	1.0	3.0	9.0	8.4
7.	Fairness:	1.5	4.7	3.3	10.0
8.	Assignments:	4.0	10.6	2.7	2.4
9.	Knowledge of Subject:	4.0	2.1	6.3	3.6
10.	Attitude Toward Student Opinions:	1.5	1.8	6.0	6.8
11.	Control:	2.0	2.3	6.6	2.4
12.	Creative Free Time:	24.3	4.6	1.7	0
13.	Encouragement of Student Participation:	1.0	0.7	4.3	5.6
14.	Planning and Preparation:	0	3.0	3.0	5.2
15.	Appearance:	4.5	0.2	2.7	0.8
16.	Tests:	0	0.2	0.3	1.2
17.	Authoritarianism:	0	0.5	0.7	0
18.	Unfair Punishment:	0	0.5	0.3	0

Table Three: Good Teacher Qualities (By Rank)

Overall Ave. Rank		Elementary School	Middle School	High School	College
1.	Attitude Toward Students:	2	1	1	1
2.	Ability to Stimulate Interest:	4	6	2	2
3.	Variety in Teaching Procedures:	3	3	2	9
4.	Attitude Toward Subject:	10	5	6	3
4.	Clarity of Explanation:	8	3	4	9
6.	Sense of Humor:	13	9	4	5
7.	Fairness:	10	7	11	4
8.	Assignments:	6	2	13	12
9.	Knowledge of Subject:	6	12	8	11
10.	Attitude Toward Student Opinions:	10	13	9	6
11.	Control:	9	11	7	12
12.	Creative Free Time:	1	8	15	(18)
13.	Encouragement of Student Participation:	13	14	10	7
14.	Planning and Preparation:	(18)	9	12	8
15.	Appearance:	5	17	13	15
16.	Tests:	(18)	17	17	14
17.	Authoritarianism:	(18)	15	16	(18)
18.	Unfair Punishment:	(18)	15	17	(18)

A typical response is provided for each of the categories which contains five percent or more of the total response qualities. Also, after each quality there is a code letter: E for Elementary School, M for Middle School, H for High School and C for College. Code letters are given only for categories with more than five percent of the response qualities, and they are rank ordered from highest to lowest. Thus, "MH" for the "Clarity of Explanations" category would mean that only Middle School and High School students gave responses scored as "Clarity of Explanations" more than five percent of the time. It also means that this category was found more frequently among the Middle Schoolers than among the High Schoolers. The coding EMHC would show a teacher quality that was valued most in Elementary School, and became less valued as schooling went on, but was still valued by at least five percent of the college students.

1) Attitude toward Students: MECH

"They don't yell." "They are friendly...smile a lot". "They make special holiday parties" (Elementary students of both sexes).

"She didn't critise very much but encouraged them to try to do better." (Middle School girl).

"This teacher demanded courtesy and self discipline from her students and was

courteous in return and she gained the respect from the students so she rarely had to raise her voice." (High School boy).

"They possess an outward human quality and are not just a 'teaching machine'." (College boy).

2) Ability to Stimulate Interest: CHME

"I like my teachers because we get to do work." (Elementary School girl).

"He showed me that I could do more things that I thought I couldn't." (Middle School boy).

"They made me feel like I wanted to learn and learn it well." (High School girl).

"They personalize education trying to make it a means of bettering oneself and society, rather than a task of memorization and facts." (College boy).

3) Variety in Teaching Procedures: EMH

"She showed a lot of movies." (Elementary School boy).

"Because she has projects to do and it is not all sitting and reading. It is maps, etc." (Middle School girl).

"Made classes interesting. They didn't have the same routine day after day and laughter was added with thought." (High School boy).

4) Attitude toward Subject: CHM

"They act like they really enjoy the subject they teach." (Middle School boy).

"Grades are not the important thing to this teacher, it's teaching and getting to the student that matters." (High School girl).

"They bring in their own ideas and experiences not just what is in the text." (College boy).

4) Clarity of Explanations: MH

"He is good because not matter how long ago we had this certain homework or how many times he explained it. He'll explain it again." (Middle School girl).

"I had a Social Studies Teacher, who explained everything thoroughly. She helped every and anyone who needed help." (High School girl).

6) Sense of Humor: HC

"Because he is witty. He makes a great football coach for girls." (High School girl).

"Man even when in a bad mood will try to snap out of it. Humorous. Doesn't stick strictly to the book." (College boy).

7) Fairness: C

The college students emphasized fairness in giving and grading tests.

8) Assignments: M

"They don't make you memerize lots of stuff for thier class." (Middle School girl).

9) Knowledge of Subject: H

"This teacher is good because he knows his subject..." (High School girl).

10) Attitude toward Student Opinions: CH

"This teacher lets everyone have their opinion and when we come to a conclusion, makes sure everyone agrees and understand." (High School boy).

"A good teacher is fair and open-minded concerning his students. He gives all a chance and listens to all ideas." (College girl).

11) Control: H

"Their ability to keep order in the classroom and not allowing anybody to mouth off to them and get away with it." (High School boy).

12) Creative Free Time: E

"When they let you do art things and stay out at reses long." (Elementary School girl).

13) Encouragement of Student Participation: C

"They discussed the subject and added a little life to the class." (College boy).

14) Planning and Preparation: C

"Syllabus gave right intent of course and work required." (College boy).

The "Bad" Teacher

Tables four and five list the bad teacher qualities by percent and rank respectively.

Table Four: Bad Teacher Qualities (In Percents)

Overall Ave. Rank		Elementary School	Middle School	High School	College
1.	Attitude Toward Students:	34.3	30.3	15.0	12.7
2.	Fairness:	3.0	10.8	10.6	12.7
3.	Clarity of Explanation:	3.0	6.3	11.6	4.9
3.	Assignments:	7.8	13.3	4.8	4.5
5.	Control:	6.0	4.5	15.7	4.1
6.	Ability to Stimulate Interest:	3.0	3.3	4.8	9.8
7.	Unfair Punishment:	7.2	8.0	5.1	2.5
8.	Attitude Toward Subject:	1.2	3.3	5.5	13.5
9.	Variety in Teaching Procedures:	7.8	3.0	1.7	4.9
10.	Attitude Toward Student Opinions:	1.8	1.5	6.1	5.7
10.	Planning and Preparation:	0	3.5	5.1	7.0
12.	Knowledge of Subject:	1.8	2.0	4.8	7.4
13.	Encouragement of Student Participation:	2.4	3.0	2.4	3.3
14.	Authoritarianism:	1.2	4.8	2.4	2.5
15.	Sense of Humor:	2.4	0.8	2.7	3.7
16.	Creative Free Time:	7.5	1.3	1.0	0
17.	Appearance:	2.4	0.8	0.7	0.4
18.	Tests:	0	0	0	0.4

Table Five: Bad Teacher Qualities (By Rank)

Overall Ave. Rank		Elementary School	Middle School	High School	College
1.	Attitude Toward Students:	1	1	2	2
2.	Fairness:	7	3	4	2
3.	Clarity of Explanations:	7	5	3	8
3.	Assignments:	2	2	9	10
5.	Control:	6	7	1	11
6.	Ability to Stimulate Interest:	7	9	9	4
7.	Unfair Punishment:	5	4	7	14
8.	Attitude Toward Subject:	15	9	6	1
9.	Variety in Teaching Procedures:	2	11	15	8
10.	Attitude Toward Student Opinions:	13	14	5	7
10.	Planning and Preparation:	(18)	8	7	6
12.	Knowledge of Subject:	13	13	9	5
13.	Encouragement of Student Participation:	10	11	13	13
14.	Authoritarianism:	15	6	13	14
15.	Sense of Humor:	10	16	12	12
16.	Creative Free Time:	4	15	16	(18)
17.	Appearance:	10	16	17	16
18.	Tests:	(18)	(18)	(18)	16

Again, a typical response is provided for each of the categories which contains five percent or more of the total response qualities. Also, the code letters E, M, H, and/or C will appear in varying orders after the response qualities (see the

explanation appearing after Table Two.)

1. Attitude Toward Students: EMHC

"They are very very mean when we are noyse." (Elementary School boy).

"She just stand over you and tell you to get to work when she bugs you you can't do it." (Middle School girl).

"Concieted, big headed, thinks he knows it all, and thinks students are scum of the school." (High School boy).

"A lack of concern for the student himself always address the class as a mass never helping the problem kid." (College boy).

2. Fairness: CMH

Middle School students complained of partiality, unfair grades, group punishment, and surprise tests.

"They may not like some kids so they give them a rough time. This makes the kid mad so he won't do his work." (High School girl).

"Grade term papers unfairly because the opinions expressed in the paper disagreed with his opinions." (College boy).

3. Clarity of Explanation: HM

"She would tell us to turn to a page in one of our books and tell us to get busy. She wouldn't explain it. She never explained anything." (Middle School girl).

"They wouldn't explain what they meant when they asked a question." (High School boy).

3. Assignments: ME

Elementary students said "bad" teachers make them work too hard, or do subjects they dislike.

"Enough homework to last more then 2 hours on a single subject." (Middle School girl).

5. Control: HE

"Bad teachers never ever let the pupils slam their desk or go out of the room." (Elementary School girl).

"He couldn't control the class. All of us could cheat and get away with it." (High School girl).

6. Ability to Stimulate Interest: C

"Is boring and does nothing to stimulate thought except the thought of getting out of class." (College girl).

7. Unfair Punishment: MEH

"They have to many rules." (Elementary School girl).

"They make many different punishments." (Middle School boy).

"Really should go back to Army. Used to much physical abuse. Always cutting us down." (High School girl).

8. Attitude Toward Subject: CH

"Just cared about getting thru the book, not if we learned anything or not." (High School girl).

"Gives the attitude from his overall preparation and conducting of class that he has no interest. It is only a way of making a living." (College boy).

9. Variety in Teaching Procedures: E

Elementary students complained that "bad" teachers never played games or records, and wouldn't let them do projects.

10. Attitude Toward Student Opinions: HC

"The teacher thinks he's right and nobody else is." (High School girl).

"They believe they are always right, although a student may show another concept or way of doing something." (College boy).

10. Planning and Preparation: CH

"Because he would skip from one subject to another - wouldn't continue the one before." (High School girl).

"Unorganized in teaching methods and work plan." (College girl).

12. Knowledge of Subject: C

"A bad teacher is one that doesn't know his material well enough to convey it to the students." (College girl).

16. Creative Free Time: E

Most of the Elementary School complaints centered around not having enough time to play during recess.

Response Qualities by Sex

Boys and girls were remarkably similar in their description of "the good teacher" and "the bad teacher." In Table Seven, only those qualities where there was a difference of five percent or more between the sexes will be reported. As can be seen, there were differences of this magnitude between the sexes in only six of the response qualities, and in only eleven instances.

Table Six: Research Population by Sex

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School	College	Total
Boys	38	78	49	62	227
Girls	32	72	57	24	185
Total	70	150	106	86	412

Table Seven: Sex Differences by Percents in Teacher Qualities

(Reported only where the difference between boys and girls was five percent or more)

	Elementary School		Middle School		High School		College	
	Good Teacher	Bad Teacher	Good Teacher	Bad Teacher	Good Teacher	Bad Teacher	Good Teacher	Bad Teacher
	%		%		%		%	
Attitude Toward Students								
Boys		28			12			14
Girls		40			21			9
Attitude Toward Subject								
Boys							8	
Girls							16	
Fairness								
Boys							12	
Girls							4	
Assignments								
Boys		11	20					
Girls		4	11					
Knowledge of Subject								
Boys					9	8		
Girls					4	3		
Creative Free Time								
Boys	26	22						
Girls	20	11						

Discussion

The elementary students saw the "good" teacher as providing "Creative Free Time" (24%), using a "Variety in Teaching Procedures" (22%), and having a patient and understanding "Attitude Toward Students" (24%). These three teacher qualities rated far ahead of any of the others. The "bad" teacher was characterized predominantly by "Attitude Toward Students" (34%). As one third-grader put it: "They are mean and yell a lot."

The Middle School students saw the "good" teacher as primarily described by "Attitude Toward Students" (31%). A pleasant personality seemed to be of great importance in the answers given. Being helpful when students were in need of help was another oft-mentioned quality. Yet another desirable trait was understanding the students. Bunched at around 10% of the responses were such "good" teacher qualities as "Assignments", "Variety in Teaching Procedures", and "Clarity of Explanations".

For the middle school students, the "bad" teacher was also best identified by "Attitude Toward Students" (30%). A major concern seemed to be that students disliked being yelled at or being criticized constantly, especially in front of others. Other "bad" teacher qualities as seen by Middle Schoolers were in the areas of "Assignments" (13%) and "Fairness" (11%).

The high school students gave a greater variety of "good" teacher qualities. Number one was still "Attitude Toward Students", but the percentage was down to 17%. Their responses are summed up in the following comments: "They care about the welfare of students"; "Try to understand and help them solve their problems"; "Students don't feel inferior"; "They spend time helping students"; "They are patient and do not make unnecessary criticism"; "Students like teachers who can give them guidance in personal problems, not just studies." Also important in the image of the "good" high school teacher were qualities such as "Variety in Teaching Procedures" (10%), "Ability to Stimulate Interest" (10%), "Clarity of Explanations" (9%), "Sense of Humor" (9%), and "Attitude Toward Subject" (8%).

The image of the "bad" high school teacher was best characterized by "Control" (16%), mostly the lack of it. Such comments as the following were typical: "Not enough discipline so we never learn anything"; "Empty threats"; "Goes too much by the rules"; "Teacher tries to be too chummy with students"; "Anyone could cheat and get away with it." Also high among "bad" teacher qualities were "Attitude Toward Students" (15%), "Clarity of Explanations" (12%), and "Fairness" (11%).

The "good" college teacher was principally described by "Attitude Toward Students" (19%). Typical were such responses as: "They give individual attention"; "They remember names"; "They give breaks when needed"; "They admit their own mistakes and don't try to cover up"; "They are available when needed." Also high were qualities such as "Ability to Stimulate Interest" (15%), "Attitude Toward Subject" (10%), and "Sense of Humor" (8%). Interestingly, "Knowledge of Subject" was

mentioned by a low 4% of college students in describing the "good" teacher.

The "bad" college teacher was primarily so categorized by "Attitude Toward Subject" (14%). Typical was the teacher who "speaks way over the head of the class." Also comments such as: "Teachers who are too intellectual"; "Bad teaching habits, as if they are not interested in what they are teaching"; "A teacher who stopped his own education when he finished graduate school." Also high were "Attitude Toward Students" (13%) and "Fairness" (13%). The comments on "Fairness" (or unfairness) centered on testing and grades, with inconsistency, overemphasis of minor details, favoritism and lack of flexibility being the major criticisms.

The highest overall ranked teacher quality for both the "good" and "bad" teacher was "Attitude Toward Students". It ranked either first or second for all four school groups. Even college students, it should be noted, expect their teachers to be "patient, understanding, considerate, and courteous" as a primary function. This does not lend support to those who might claim that "the major duty of a professor is to profess", at least insofar as the students view it.

Some teacher qualities remained rather even and steady through all four school age groups. Other qualities were uneven. For example, "Control" peaked in High School for both the "good" and "bad" teacher images. "Assignments" were given a relatively high score for both "good" and "bad" teachers in Middle School. It is possible that these peaks are specific to the local school system being studied. There were, however, some general trends: a general increase in importance from Elementary to College, and a general decrease in importance from Elementary to College.

Increasing in importance as the students were older and more school-wise were these teacher qualities for both "good" and "bad" teacher images: "Ability to Stimulate Interest", "Attitude Toward Subject", "Attitude Toward Student Opinions", and "Fairness". Increasing in importance for the "good" teacher role was "Sense of Humor".

Other teacher qualities showed a decrease in importance as one went up the educational ladder. Becoming less important for both "good" and "bad" teacher images were "Attitude Toward Students" (still always important) and "Creative Free Time." Decreasing in importance for the "good" teacher role was "Variety in Teaching Procedures."

Summary

A study of student-perceived teacher roles was attempted at four different school levels: Elementary School, Middle School, High School, and College. In each case, students were asked to give three qualities which characterized the "good" teacher and three qualities which characterized the "bad" teacher. These written responses were then post-coded and scored in one of eighteen possible categories according to a protocol adapted from studies at Western Michigan University.

Results were compared for students in the different schools. Elementary students saw "Creative Free Time", "Attitude Toward Students", and "Variety of Teaching Procedures" as most important. Middle School students rated "Attitude Toward Students" as an overwhelmingly important teacher quality. For High School students, the important teacher qualities were "Attitude Toward Students", "Control", "Clarity of Explanations", "Variety in Teaching Procedures", and "Ability to Stimulate Interest". For collegians, the important teacher qualities were "Attitude Toward Students", "Ability to Stimulate Interest", "Attitude Toward Subject", and "Fairness".

The differences between the sexes in assigning teacher qualities were relatively few and minor.

Increasing in importance at the higher school levels were these qualities: "Ability to Stimulate Interest", "Attitude Toward Subject", "Attitude Toward Student Opinions", and "Fairness". Becoming less important at the higher levels were "Attitude Toward Students" and "Creative Free Time".

The single most important teacher quality at all four school levels was the "Attitude Toward Students".

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Appendix

SCORING CATEGORIES FOR GOOD AND BAD TEACHER QUALITIES

(Modified from "Student-Opinion Questionnaire" used by the Student Reaction Center at Western Michigan University)

1. KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT: Does he have a thorough knowledge and understanding of his teaching field?
2. CLARITY OF EXPLANATIONS: Are assignments and explanations clear?
3. FAIRNESS: Is he fair and impartial in his treatment of all students?
4. CONTROL: Does he keep enough order in the classroom? Do students behave well?
5. ATTITUDE TOWARD STUDENTS: Is he patient, understanding, considerate, and courteous?
6. ABILITY TO STIMULATE INTEREST: Is this class interesting and challenging?
7. ATTITUDE TOWARD SUBJECT: Does he show interest in and enthusiasm for the subject? Does he appear to enjoy teaching this subject?
8. ATTITUDE TOWARD STUDENT OPINIONS: Are the ideas and opinions of students treated with respect? Are differences of opinion welcomed even when a student disagrees with the teacher?
9. VARIETY IN TEACHING PROCEDURES: Is much the same procedure used day after day and month after month, or are different and appropriate teaching methods used at different times (student reports, class discussions, small-group discussions, films and other audio-visual aids, demonstrations, debates, field trips, teacher lectures, guest lectures, etc.)?
10. ENCOURAGEMENT OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION: Do students feel free to raise questions and express opinions? Are students encouraged to take part?
11. SENSE OF HUMOR: Does he see and share with students amusing happenings and experiences?
12. PLANNING AND PREPARATION: Are plans well made? Is class time well spent? Is little time wasted?
13. ASSIGNMENTS: Are assignments (out-of-class, required work) sufficiently challenging without being unreasonably long? Is the weight of assignments reasonable?
14. APPEARANCE: Are his dress and bearing appropriate?
15. CREATIVE FREE TIME: Does he provide multiple extracurricular activities? Does he give the students time to do what they want?
16. UNFAIR PUNISHMENT: Is he mean? Are his punishments unfair or overly severe?
17. AUTHORITARIANISM: Does he push too hard? Does he show off? Does he try to force learning?
18. TESTS: Are his tests reasonable?